

**Winchester, Eastleigh & Romsey Circuit**  
**SERVICE AT HOME – Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2021**

**Preparation**

As we prepare to worship God, take a moment to calm your mind and focus on God's presence with you in the moment. Perhaps light a candle as a reminder of Christ's resurrected glory, present with us now and always.

**Call to Worship**

This is the day which the Lord has made;

**let us rejoice and be glad in it.**

It is good to give thanks to the Lord;

**for God's love endures for ever.**

**Listen, Read, Pray or Sing Along**

Crown him with many crowns (StF 347)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FiJYgC\\_6AFc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FiJYgC_6AFc)

Crown him with many crowns,  
the Lamb upon the throne.  
Hark! how the heavenly anthem drowns  
all music but its own.  
Awake my soul, and sing  
of him who died for thee,  
and hail him as they matchless King  
through all eternity.

Crown him the Son of God,  
before the worlds began;  
and ye who tread where he has trod,  
crown him the Son of Man,  
who every grief has known  
that wrings the human breast,  
and takes and bears them for his own,  
that all in him may rest.

Crown him the Lord of life,  
who triumphed o'er the grave,  
and rose victorious in the strife  
for those he came to save.  
His glories now we sing,  
who died, and rose on high;  
who died, eternal life to bring,  
and lives, that death may die.

Crown him the Lord of peace,  
whose power a sceptre sways  
from pole to pole, that wars may cease,  
absorbed in prayer and praise.  
His reign shall know no end,  
and round his pierced feet  
fair flowers of paradise extend  
their fragrance ever sweet.

Crown him the Lord of love;  
behold his hands and side –  
rich wounds, yet visible above,  
in beauty glorified.  
All hail, Redeemer, hail!  
for thou hast died for me;  
thy praise and glory shall not fail  
throughout eternity.

Matthew Bridges (1800-1894)  
and Godfrey Thring (1823-1903)

**Prayers of Approach and Confession**

Almighty God,  
to whom all hearts are open,  
all desires known,  
and from whom no secrets are hidden:  
cleanse the thoughts of our hearts  
by the inspiration of your Holy Spirit,  
that we may perfectly love you,  
and worthily magnify your holy name;  
through Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

Let us confess our sins to God and ask for forgiveness.

**Lord God most merciful,  
we confess that we have sinned,  
through our own fault,  
and in common with others,  
in thought, word and deed,  
and through what we have left undone.  
We ask to be forgiven.**

**By the power of your Spirit  
turn us from evil to good,  
help us to forgive others,  
and keep us in your ways  
of righteousness and love;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen**

In repentance and in faith  
receive the promise of grace  
and the assurance of pardon.  
Here are words you may trust,  
words that merit full acceptance:  
'Christ Jesus came into the world to save  
sinners.'

Your sins are forgiven for his sake.

**Thanks be to God.**

**Read Psalm 22: 25-31**

**Read John 15: 1-8**

### **Reflection**

Today's Gospel reading addresses the theme of pruning. It pictures God as a gardener who prunes the vines to effect greater spiritual growth. The timeless truth being spelled out here is that in order for good, sustainable and fruitful growth to occur, pruning must also take place. It's a concept the green-fingered among us will accept with relative ease realising its necessity. Yet we often find this truth much more challenging to apply in our own lives. It's one thing to inflict pain on a cherished shrub knowing that we're preparing it for its next season of growth, it's entirely another thing to feel the pain of pruning ourselves, whether the shears are in our hands, someone else's or God's. Yet we know that, just as it is for the shrub, pruning is an on-going task for us, constantly challenging us to think of where and what we must 'cut back' in our own lives to allow fresh more Godly growth to thrive.

In ancient Israel vines were prized plants; The prophets Micah and Zechariah spoke of how God's peace came about when everyone sat under their own vine, a symbol of prosperity

and a life settled enough to plant for the long term. In Jeremiah 2, Israel is described as God's vine emphasising the relationship between God and his people. It is unsurprising therefore that Jesus picks up on this image to describe his own special relationship with God; as essential to his life as a vine grower is essential to a plant's life. More surprising, perhaps, is his use of the image of this natural organic dependence to illustrate the special relationship between himself and his followers, relying on him for their very life, sharing the energy that he provides and enabling his life to bear fruit. The word '*abide*' is especially important in this context and is used over and over again in John's Gospel to reflect on-going, permanent relationship with Christ. But that relationship isn't just the warm, comforting, nurturing kind, for vines need to be pruned, cut back and shaped in winter to determine the number of buds that will be allowed to become grape clusters. The growing of good fruit takes time and patience and constant attention. This is the purpose of abiding in Christ; this is the point of the relationship we have with him, and it is costly. We rejoice when that good fruit finally comes forth, yet we find it much harder to rejoice in being shaped by Christ in every way.

So how, as churches, do we respond faithfully to this reading? Well in these verses we might view God as an 'expert gardener', who unlike us, knows where, when and how deep to make the right cuts. By being open to the leading of the Spirit the spiritual shears can be wielded with the expert precision, carefully and sensitively removing anything that hinders our spiritual growth and ability to bear fruit. The Lord's 'pruning' can take

many forms and can be as painless as having a haircut to dispose of split ends, or as painful as having root and branch surgery to remove harmful agents from the body. Either way, the aim is the same; to bring into being a flourishing person, or community.

Furthermore, it's important to note that the reading describes a 'dependent' relationship with the divine gardener, something which goes against our natural instincts to be independent and self-sufficient. However, Jesus is adamant that '*apart from me you can do nothing.*' Likewise, Jesus is also clear that we abide in him for a purpose – the branches are not joined to the vine solely for survival but also for growth. There is an explicit understanding that the gardener expects the branches to be productive rather than just looking pretty.

Like everything in life, there is a time to grow, and God desires good growth. Growth that will last, that will be productive, that will bear good fruit. But are we prepared to allow God to prune us spiritually in order that that good Godly growth can occur? Are there things that God is calling us to let go of in order that new possibilities may be allowed to flourish?

May we acknowledge God's role in the whole of our lives and our church communities, both in their growth and in their contraction. May God's hand guide us, helping us to tend the vine carefully and lovingly, and may God, in time, bring us all into the fullness of relationship with him to the praise of his eternal name. Amen.

### **Prayers of Thanksgiving and Intercession**

Almighty God,  
whose Spirit helps us in our weakness  
and guides us in our prayers;  
we pray for the Church and for the world  
in the name of Jesus Christ.

We pray for the Church throughout the world  
and all those involved in church leadership,  
local unity and witness.

Renew the faith and life of the Church;  
strengthen its witness;  
and make it one in Christ.

Grant that we  
and all who confess that he is Lord  
may be faithful in service  
and filled with his spirit,  
and that the world may be turned to Christ.

We pray for  
the nations of the world,  
our own country  
and all who work for reconciliation.  
Guide the nations in the ways  
of justice, liberty and peace;  
and help them to seek the unity  
and welfare of all peoples.  
Give to our Queen and to all in authority  
wisdom to know  
and strength to do what is right.

We pray for  
the sick and the suffering,  
victims of injustice  
and the lonely and the bereaved.  
Comfort those in sorrow;  
heal the sick in body or in mind;  
and deliver the oppressed.  
Give us active sympathy for all who suffer;  
and help us so to bear the burdens of others  
that we may fulfil the law of Christ.

We pray for  
our families, friends and neighbours  
and all who need our prayers -  
keeping silence for a moment as we reflect on  
the concerns closest to our own hearts ...

Keep us and the members of our families  
united in loyalty and in love,  
and always in your care;  
and may our friends and neighbours,  
and all for whom we pray,  
receive the help they need,  
and live in peace.

We remember those who have died.  
Eternal God, accept our thanks and praise  
for all who have served you  
faithfully here on earth,  
and especially for those  
dear to our own hearts.  
May we and all your people,  
past, present and to come,  
share the life and joy of your kingdom,  
Through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

### **The Lord's Prayer**

#### **Listen, Read, Pray or Sing Along**

Help us, O Lord, to learn (StF 501)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ceburn3tuzQ>

Help us, O Lord, to learn  
the truths your word imparts,  
to study that your laws may be  
inscribed upon our hearts.

Help us, O Lord, to live  
the faith which we proclaim,  
that all our thoughts and words and deeds  
may glorify your name.

Help us, O Lord, to teach  
the beauty of your ways,  
that all who seek many find the Christ,  
and make a life of praise.

William Watkins Reid (b. 1923)

#### **Dismissal & Blessing**

Our worship has not ended –  
it has only just begun –  
for God is with us  
every moment of every day!  
Go then, and offer the worship he desires –  
to do justice,  
to love kindness,  
and to walk humbly with him,  
every step along our way.

And the blessing of God,  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit, be yours,  
this day and forever more. Amen

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Service prepared by the Revd Tim Searle

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